

# PHD THESIS

## DOMINO CUBES

### – EX-YUGOSLAV LITERARY CONTACTS IN ISTVÁN DOMONKOS’S ART –

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## 1. The subject matter and the objectives of the thesis

The paper suggests a theoretical introduction to the complex network of literary relations between the Hungarians of Vojvodina and the ex-Yugoslav nations, and the importance of interpreting the geo-cultural region. This points out some complex, maze-like problems, ranging from the interoperability between cultures, a strict separation of the two- and multilingualism, to the translation as a form of understanding the other or, conversely, the questions of misunderstanding. The literature in Vojvodina, including the *Új Symposion* magazine reflects on these issues. The Yugoslav era of Hungarian literature in Vojvodina is a multi-path labyrinth, with many doors: in the Vojvodina Hungarian existence, identity and culture can only be artificially separated from the southern Slavic nations. The *Új Symposion* magazine had continued and revalued the tradition of journals like *Tűz*, *Vajdasági Írás*, *Bácsmegyei Napló*, *Kalangya*, *Híd*, and it was upgraded to include a reflection on another culture, continuous reception, literary translation, by joint appearances. In Vojvodinian Hungarian culture this was the magazine that vividly reacted to the ex-Yugoslav intellectual climate.

When I use the term "symposionist" in my paper, then I mean a complex, multicultural identity, which reflects on his own culture and on the culture of the other. Following the insights of Alpár Losoncz<sup>1</sup>, Kornélia Faragó<sup>2</sup> and Beáta Thomka<sup>3</sup> the term „symposionist" refers to belonging to the common workshop. This is not displayed to the same degree by every „symposionist". Also, it should be noted that the cultural attitude of the Vojvodinian Hungarians who reflect on their own and on the other culture, did not start with symposionists. All this had already been the attitude of previous magazines (*Tűz*, *Vajdasági*

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<sup>1</sup> Losoncz Alpár: *Kommentár? (Adalékok az Új Symposion szellemiségének értelmezéséhez)*, In: L. A.: *Hiányvonalakozások*, Forum, Újvidék, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> Faragó Kornélia: *Kulturális interpretáció – nemzedéki nyelvszakadadás – átsugárzó jelentéskörök*, In: F. K.: *A viszonyosság alakzatai*, Forum, Újvidék, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Thomka Beáta: *Symposion-kollázs*, In: T. B.: *Déli témák*, zEtna, Zenta, 2009.

*Írás, Bácsmegyei Napló, Kalangya, Hid*). The difference is that similarly to the ambivalent Yugoslav cultural system, *Új Symposion* published even those texts which did not serve the political and aesthetic expectations of the regime. And it must be added that *Új Symposion* was more radical in its visuality than the previous magazines in Vojvodina. The symposionists were more sensitive and incorporated a vision of their experience in different fields of art reception, and they had a wider orientation in world literature.

In my paper I analyse the relations between cultures through artistic expressions of István Domonkos. I interpret István Domonkos as an „archethypal” symposionist, because he writes poems, prose, dramas, essays, critiques, he translates from ex-Yugoslavian languages and from German and Swedish into Hungarian, and beside this he is a multi-instrumentalist musician and visual artist, as well. The art of Domonkos can be interpreted as an act of problematisation of Hungarian literary canon of the time. According to István Fried, Hungarian immigrant neo-avantgarde literature is important, because it called into question the national literary canon structure which was true to dictatorship.<sup>4</sup> Fried's findings can be valid for minority literature, so in the case of Hungarian literature in Vojvodina, as well. The art of the *Új Symposion* authors is in dialogue with the avantgarde and neoavantgarde of European and ex-Yugoslavian nations, and completes, differentiates the discourses of Hungarian literature.

In Domonkos's works translations play a significant role, even if the reception has not analysed them until now. János Bányai states that translation is one of the most important characteristics of minority culture.<sup>5</sup> In this context it is important to note what Álpár Losoncz claims (referring to Friedrich Schlegel and Derrida) about translation and the other culture: This process cannot be completed, there would always be something untranslatable,

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<sup>4</sup> Fried István: *Emigráció és labirintus. Kelet-közép-európai lét-és tudatformák*, In: F. I.: *A névadás lehetőségessége*, Madách-Pozonium, Pozsony, 2004, 116-117.

<sup>5</sup> Bányai János: *Fordítás, összevetés. Adat a kisebbségi kultúra létmódjának leírásához*, In: B. J.: *Kisebbségi magyaróra*, Forum, Újvidék, 1996, 46-47.

unintelligible to remain.<sup>6</sup> As a result, in my study I interpret translation as a task which is impossible to finish, a cultural practice. Therefore, I have considered Domonkos's works and translations that they are mere possibilities, variations, just as well my interpretative experiments.

My thesis is written around the metaphor of the labyrinth, which has two main entrances: One of them enters the problems of multiculturalism and its poetic reflections. I have described the minority literature – according to László Végel's metaphore<sup>7</sup> – as centaur-literature, and that is a literature of parallel worlds, traditions, cultures. After this I interpret Domonkos's experience of various literary expressions of the cultural crossings. It comes to multilingualism, linguistic interaction problem, the issue of foreign language or the relativity of imaginary space in Domonkos's last book 'YU-HU-Rap'. The second entrance of my labyrinth leads us to the cultural practice of literary translation. After the theoretical introduction, I will show a few typical examples in Domonkos's literary translation works. And since Domonkos has mostly translated poems, I have analysed his verse translations. My work does not deal with all the author's translations, all his book reviews of ex-Yugoslavian literatures, all of his Serbo-Croatian translations, with all South Slavic allusions etc. Instead, I present and interpret some representative examples how Domonkos's art and *Új Symposion* reflect on ex-Yugoslavian literature and art. At the end of the study the bibliography of Domonkos's translations are listed in a separate chapter, one can search further on this basis. The analysis of translations follows the chronology of the author's works. In the critical literature about *Új Symposion* we can find a few commonplaces as well, e. g. the lack of tradition of symposionists, or using the concept of multiculturalism without any critical consideration etc. For my part, I tried to highlight the Symposion-commonplaces from standpoints which have been less discussed, accepting the possibility of errors due to risk of

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<sup>6</sup> Alpar Lošonc: *Prevođenje kao društvena praksa*, *Nova misao* 2010/8., 26-27.

<sup>7</sup> Végel László: *Kisebbségi elégia*, In: V. L.: *Hontalan esszék*, Jelenkor, Pécs, 2003.

the unknown. I do not consider the works of Domonkos and the magazine from Újvidék/Novi Sad as an unquestionable holiness, but as meaningful tradition ready for revaluation.

## **2. Method for the thesis**

Following the tradition of comparative study the thesis involves various disciplines, interdisciplinary approach to the subject. The various scientific discourses include cultural theories (e. g. Hommi K. Bhaba, Stanley Fish, Slavoj Žižek), translation-theories (e. g. Sándor Albert, Adrienne Gálosi, Itamar Even-Zohar, György Rába, Paul de Man, Walter Benjamin), philosophy (e. g. Hannah Arendt, Kant, Kierkegaard, Alpár Losoncz), Croatian, Hungarian, Serbian and Slovenian literature, historical studies, comparative literature (e. g. Imre Bori, István Fried, István Lőkös, István Lukács, János Bányai, László Sziklay), psychology (Freud), and religion study (Gershom Sholem, Mircea Eliade). This interdisciplinarity harmonises well with the labyrinth metaphor, since with each of disciplines included in the analysis many new opportunities are revealed to me. Likewise, the various disciplines associated with the operation of the paper can be interpreted in the context of Itamar Even-Zohar's „polysistem theory”. But after the introduction, where I have defined interpretation as possibility, I did not use the points of view arisen from various disciplines exclusively, but to enrich the existing reception, or as a test of new approaches.

Literary translation is compared to the acting, so translation is interpreted as an act of putting on masks. To develop this idea I have used theoretical texts about theater (Brook, Pirandello, Samuel Weber) and translation.

By the analysis of literary translations I have checked the philological correctness in Domonkos's works. I have intended to produce comparative analysis with comparing the original and the translation(s), and less to judge the quality of the translations. I have criticised

the translations only where I have noticed larger and seemingly unjustified changes in content and form as well.

The study is trying to show the geo-cultural multi-lingual environment in an example of one author's works, and this is why I used Hungarian and Serbian literary studies and works from Vojvodina and of other ex-Yugoslavia nations. In several cases I have used the separation of the horizons (Jauss) method, and observed and several times compared the period analyses with contemporary reception.

### 3. Results of the dissertation

If we take a look at the analysed translations, Domonkos's literary works, then we can conclude, that they are inseparable from the socio-cultural background in which they have been created. Whether it is Vojvodinian, ex-Yugoslavian, or even Swedish environment, we found that Domonkos's „minority” literature stayed in that language labyrinth which marked his works from the very beginning.

The term „minority” by Domonkos – and the cultural practice of *Új Symposion* – is connected to László Végel's metaphor of centaur. Domonkos's writing and literary translation activity is "inter-language state" phenomenon.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, minority discourse – be it of a national, sexual or other type – is always in need of translation. Translation is not just an interpretation from one language to another, but also an interpretation within the language.<sup>9</sup> "Minority" experience of existence is suspicious against dominant cultural practices, and maintains a distanced critical position. In his Hungarian minority position Domonkos translates ex-Yugoslavian literatures, gets inspiration from them, writes in „Serbo-Croatian”

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<sup>8</sup> Végel László: *Meditáció Iliáról*, In: *Ilia – Írások 70. születésnapjára*, Bába, Szeged, 2004, 35-36.

<sup>9</sup> Losoncz Alpár: *A fordító magánya: fölöttébb személyes jellegű (vajdasági) széljegyzet a magyar egyetemesség gyűrődéseiről*, In: *Ilia – Írások 70. születésnapjára*: i. m. 193.

language, questions the closed, defensive minority norm. The authors' works created in the intersection of different cultures challenged the dominant literary language systems in Hungary at that time. This „translator's loneliness" points out a critical behaviour.

In my analysis of Domonkos's translations I have found that he worked with a Central European<sup>10</sup> method: he tried to follow the forms of the original poems. However, in a few examples he was not entirely strict with them, like in the translation of Srečko Kosovel's sonnets. Domonkos freely translated the bound forms, but this freedom can not be identified with the French method. In formal sense, Domonkos's translations are similar to the original texts, but they do not return any properties of them. In many cases Domonkos rewrote the original poems, his interpretations are closer to the atmosphere of the originals. That is why we can conclude that Domonkos's translations are impressionist in nature (but not impressionist), although many of them follow correctly the characteristics of the original texts. And like most of the Central European translators, he often used the method of compensation: what he could not reproduce exactly, he created a similar solution elsewhere in the spirit of offset. In summary, Domonkos uses the Central European literary translation rule with the freedom of French method. However, this did not result in extreme examples in his works.

If we take a look at the translations published in *Új Szimpozium*, and Domonkos's works, it can be concluded that their reception is limited. It seems that only authors have reflected to translation as a cultural practice and not the reception. But in my study I have found that there are many connections between Domonkos's literary works and his translations, uncovering them can enrich the processing of the author's oeuvre.

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<sup>10</sup> Vö.: Marko Čudić: *Danilo Kiš i moderna mađarska poezija*, Plato, Beograd, 2007, 35.

#### 4. The thesis publications provided

##### Studies

1. *Kentaur-irodalom. Az Új Symposion anyanyelvi idegenségéről*, HÍD 2006/6-7.
2. *A gastarbeiter nyelv költői reflexiója (Ivan Slamnig és Domonkos István)*, Tiszatáj 2007/1.
3. *A műfordító maszkfelvétele*, Kalligram 2007/02.
4. *Miloš Crnjanski Stražilovo című költeményének műfordítói teatralitása (a fiatal Domonkos István arcjátéka)*, Tiszatáj 2007/9.
5. *Domonkos István nyelvváltása: fordítás mint létezés-metafora*, Filológiai Közlöny 2007/1-2.
6. *Kalandozások a szerb, horvát, szlovén irodalomban*, Bárka 2010/1.
7. *A költészet maradványa a gonosz banalitásával szemben (Domonkos István: YU-HU-Rap)*, Híd 2010/7.
8. *A hallgatás extázisa. Momčilo Nastasijević verszenéje Domonkos István hangolásában*, Korunk 2010/6.
9. *A vers zárt tere. Domonkos István Branko Miljkovićot fordít*, In: Szövegek között XV., Szerkesztő: Fried István, 2010, Szeged
10. *A szorongás fordíthatóságáról. Domonkos István Slavko Mihalić városában*, Szövegek között XVI., Szerkesztő: Fried István, Szeged, 2011.



## Review, critique

1. *Mi a zsír? (Tolnai Ottó: Költő disznózsírból című könyvéről)*, Forrás 2005/10., 107-112.
2. *Az én lepattant szilánkjai (Kollár Árpád: például a madzag)*, Vár Ucca Műhely 2005/3, 83-86.
3. *A szóban halmozódó vég (Koncz István: Összegyűjtött versei)*, Forrás 2006/11.
4. „Mi ma”. Szerbhorváth György: *Vajdasági lakoma. Az Új Symposion történetéről*, Bárka 2007/2.
5. *Egy családtörténet fénylő sebei. (Maurits Ferenc: Szürkület, szürkületben)*, Forrás 2007/4.
6. „republica paranoica”. Aaron Blumm: *Csáth kocsit hajt*, Irodalmi Jelen 2007/69.
7. *Nem megy sehová (Szakmány György: Apu nem megy sehová című kötetéről)*, Kalligram 2008/05
8. *Selyem, versolajos vízben (Domonkos István: YU-HU-Rap)*, Bárka 2009/3.
9. *Rekviem, torzítóval (Fenyvesi Ottó: Halott vajdaságiakat olvasva)*, Kalligram 2010/5.
10. *Elmélyült provokáció. Medve A. Zoltán: Kontextusok és annotációk*, Jelenkor 2011/1.
11. *Az olvadó hó neszében korgó gyomor (Danyi Zoltán: Hullámok után a tó sima tükre)*, Alföld 2011/6.